

GAIN AN EDGE:

NUTRITION, HYDRATION

...and Sleep

Nutrition is a key contributor to performance, but it's often overlooked. Introduce good nutrition habits to your young athlete early and you'll not only help them maximize their performance, you'll set them up for a healthier lifestyle, too. Here are some tips from USA Hockey.

Nutrition Tips:

EATING WELL-BALANCED MEALS, with foods from each of the essential food groups (vegetables, fruit, lean meat, dairy, healthy fats), is still the best advice.

HIGH-QUALITY FORMS of these foods are packaged with high-quality nutrients, instead of bad nutrients.

THINK OF FOOD AS THE FUEL and building blocks for everything your young athlete does. Carbohydrates (e.g., oatmeal brown rice, whole-grain bread, fruit/vegetables, beans), proteins (e.g., chicken breast, eggs, fish, lean beef, beans, nuts/seeds, milk), and fats (e.g., olive oil, fish, nuts/seeds, avocado) provide the energy their body needs for both school and athletic performance.

WHEN EATING ON THE ROAD, research restaurant menus online in advance to determine if they have balanced

meal options. Also, consider visiting a grocery store instead of a restaurant. Healthy foods from a grocery store (e.g., whole-grain bread, lean meats, spinach, fruits, nuts, cheese sticks) often have more high-quality nutrients, fewer unhealthy nutrients and lower costs.

AVOID EXCESSIVE SAUCES or dressings, which can be packed with empty calories. Ask for them on the side to control portions and choose olive oil-based as a healthier option.

AVOID FRIED FOODS. Grilled and steamed foods are healthier choices.

DRINK MORE WATER. Studies show that people suffer a five percent decrease in cognitive function for every one percent of dehydration.

URINE COLOR is a good indicator of hydration level. Clear to pale yellow is good; darker yellow is bad.

AS A RECOVERY DRINK after exertion, fat-free chocolate milk can be an excellent choice. According to WebMD, it "beat out carbohydrate sports drinks at helping to rebuild and refuel muscles after exercise." It's often less expensive than carbohydrate sports drinks, too.



MINIMIZE OR ELIMINATE soda pop and sport drinks, especially outside of performance or training time.

Sleep Tips:

LIFESTYLES HAVE BECOME increasingly busy, but for children and athletes in particular, foregoing proper sleep is acutely damaging.



ACCORDING TO EXTENSIVE STUDY by doctors and scientists, children between the ages of 3 and 6 should sleep 10-12 hours nightly for optimal health and function. For children between 7 and 12 years of age, the recommendation is 10-11 hours. For 12-to-18-year-olds, the recommendation is 8-9 hours. When people are deprived of adequate sleep, or suffer from inconsistent sleep patterns, "the brain functions at a subpar level, with slower reaction times, impaired judgment and emotional instability." – Michael Sweeney, *Brain: The Complete Mind, How It Develops, How It Works, and How to Keep It Sharp*.